



News Release

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OMAHA -- The Army Corps of Engineers announced today that it has delayed delivery of its revised draft implementation plan for the reasonable and prudent alternative presented in the Final Biological Opinion on the Missouri River issued by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It had been slated for delivery in late February. A draft is now expected in May.

"The effort has taken longer than we expected because of the comments on our draft plan," said Brig. Gen. Carl Strock, Northwestern Division Engineer. "We received approximately 2,000 comments on the draft. While a majority were form-letter comments supporting the Service's recommendation, there were quite a few that require careful evaluation," he added.

Comments were provided by a variety of state agencies, cities and special interest groups that raised questions about the scientific basis for the spawning cues for pallid sturgeon, especially the timing, frequency, duration and size of the proposed higher flows in the spring and low summer flows. Also addressed were the potential impacts on flood control, hydropower production, navigation, and other authorized purposes such as river recreation and water supply.

"Our intent," added General Strock, "is to use the draft plan as a basis for a preferred alternative when we modify the Missouri River Master Water Control Manual that:

- meets the contemporary needs of the basin, as defined by the people of the basin,
- does not jeopardize the continued existence of fish and birds listed for protection under the Endangered Species Act,
- serves the authorized purposes of the system of dams and reservoirs, and
- can be implemented in March 2003.

The Corps is working with the Service to develop an implementation plan that complies with the act. A draft is expected in May followed by the development of a preferred alternative for presentation in the revised draft EIS.

The release of the revised draft EIS will mark the beginning of a six-month comment period. It will include the opportunity for people to obtain and read the documents, an extensive series of workshops, and public meetings to collect comments. Following will be the publication of the final EIS, record of decision and rewriting of the Master Manual. Implementation of an annual operating plan based on the new manual remains March 2003.